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# THE IMPERSONAL ASPECT OF SHAKESPEARE'S ART <sup>1</sup>

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## I

It has been said many times that it is mere futility to trouble one's head about the biographical or personal aspect of Shakespeare's entity. It should be sufficient for us to possess his works, and to enjoy them without seeking knowledge of the man behind them. Whether Shakespeare were born at Stratford-on-Avon or in Timbuctoo, whether he lived in the sixteenth century or the sixth, whether he were a collectivist or an individualist, a teetotaler or a wine-drinker, a monarchist or an anarchist, a monotheist or a pantheist, a puritan or a Roman Catholic, are, it is alleged, matters of no consequence, if not of irrelevance, for the student of *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. When a dish of fine fruit is set before us at table, we should show ourselves almost unworthy of its sweet flavour and savour if we at once initiated investigation into the nature of the tree which produced it, and sought details touching the plant's growth and nurture.

There is much to be said for the attitude which seeks in literature pleasurable sensation, relief from sorrow, distraction from anxiety. It is not an attitude which is to be despised. But it cannot be the main position of the English Association. The scholar, critic, and teacher aim, in the study of literature, at something beyond experience of transient sensation. They aim at accuracy in the appreciation of an author's work; they try to measure its merits and defects, to estimate its originality or creative power. The critic and teacher examine the causes of literary achievement as well as its effects. It is pedantry to concentrate attention on the causes of literature to the neglect of its results; but there is scholarly virtue in a prudent survey of the external circumstance which attends the birth and life of literature.

<sup>1</sup> A lecture delivered to the members of the English Association, June 11, 1909.



In any case, to refuse to interest one's self in a great author's history or personality is almost to defy a natural instinct, which impels inquiry about those who prove themselves our benefactors. We are not endeavouring to gratify trivial curiosity. If we go the right way to work, biographical research may be the best shape that a tribute of admiration and affection can take.

When one seeks knowledge of the personality of an author who died 300 years ago, one finds that the sources may, as a rule, be roughly divided into two kinds. Firstly, there are the records left by others concerning him. Secondly, there are the records about himself of his own making. We have to piece together external evidence and internal evidence. To-night I chiefly inquire to what the internal evidence amounts in Shakespeare's plays—What is the revelation which Shakespeare made in his plays of his private experiences and sentiments?

The external evidence you know, and it need not detain us long. I take for granted that the outward facts of Shakespeare's life are familiar to you. The external circumstance of his career is, in my opinion, now accessible to us in as full detail as is requisite. The traditional regrets that the facts of Shakespeare's biography are scanty or doubtful seem to me to lack substantial justification. At the same time I fully admit that what is recorded of Shakespeare's life at Stratford-on-Avon or in London throws little or no light on his literary character, on his poetic aims, on his spiritual nature. But to my mind it is unreasonable to scorn revelations of him in the rough and tumble of the workaday world, because they do not present him always wearing the laurel crown.

A village youth, whose parents' material fortunes steadily declined in his early manhood, he injudiciously married as a mere boy, as boys sometimes will, a woman eight years his senior. Then he left his family in the country to make a career for himself in London. He was stagestruck and longed to act and write plays. In London, after a short interval, his triumphs as a dramatist gained for him an assured position in theatrical circles. He never obtained much reputation as an actor. Evidence of his professional progress makes it clear that he was singularly industrious, singularly level-headed, and amply endowed with that practical common sense which enables a man to acquire and retain a moderate competence. His financial rewards were substantial. He husbanded his pecuniary profits; he purchased houses and lands in his native place, whither he returned while yet middle-aged to enjoy a placid retirement. A current popular fallacy would represent all men of poetic genius as despising the prosaic and conventional aim of making a livelihood. I have heard it argued that Shakespeare could not have written plays because he made good bargains with theatrical managers and saved money. There are, of course, notorious examples of poets proving bad economists, of poets living and dying in heart-rending poverty. Rarely are the profits of literature great, and the artistic temperament has been known to be incapable not only of comprehending the value of money when earned, but, worse still, even of earning any money at all. On the other hand, the examples of men of immense power in the highest field of literary effort proving efficient and rigorous men of business are so numerous, that there is nothing in the fully attested

information regarding Shakespeare's business aptitude to rouse the smallest surprise. Chaucer and Sir Walter Scott, and, to take a foreign instance, Goethe, had all Shakespeare's sobriety in dealing with life's practical affairs. Almost all the great English novelists—and dramatic poets have some affinity with novelists—Richardson, Dickens, George Eliot, have illustrated the conjunction of imaginative power with some financial capacity. Great writers of recent times in other branches of literature—Carlyle, Macaulay, Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Herbert Spencer—did not defy the normal predilection for a balance on the right side at the bank. There is nothing to disturb one's equanimity in a frank recognition that Shakespeare's colossal genius was linked with perfect sanity in his attitude to the fiscal problems which confront us all.

Shakespeare seems, in fact, to have had most of the bourgeois notions of comfort and respectability. Like many fellow-actors, theatrical managers, and other parvenus, who by their own efforts became affluent, he acquired a rather dubious coat of arms. In his family relations he does not seem to have lived on very cordial terms with his elderly wife, but his will suggests that he maintained unbroken an affectionate intimacy with his elder daughter, and that he was a model grandfather.

Knowledge of this kind fails to define or illustrate Shakespeare's poetic individuality or his spiritual affinities. But it is not to be neglected. By bringing into prominent relief features in his character which set him on a level with other men, it makes our conception of his superiority in other directions the more real and actual. It does not explain or demonstrate the infinitude of his genius, which is another story, and loses nothing if it prove incapable of matter-of-fact, concrete explanation.

The study of Shakespeare's biography in the light of contemporary literary history shows that his practical experiences and fortunes did not materially differ from those who followed his profession of dramatist. His conscious aims and practices seem indistinguishable from those of contemporary men of letters. The mighty difference between his endeavours and those of his fellows must be assigned to the magical and involuntary working of genius, which, since the birth of poetry, has owned as large a charter as the wind to blow on whom it pleases. A very small acquaintance with the literary history of the world proves the hopelessness of seeking in details of birth or education, or in the common facts of life's everyday business, the secret springs of poetic inspiration.

The external biographic evidence also includes some early oral traditions and a few descriptions given of Shakespeare by contemporaries. Such evidence mainly attests the dramatist's modesty and amiability in ordinary social relations. He won the affection of professional friends. 'I loved the man,' wrote his friend Ben Jonson, 'and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent fancy, brave notions, and gentle expressions.' Another witness notes that he was 'very good company and of a very ready and smooth wit'. There is ample corroboration of a genial and convivial temperament linked to a quiet turn for good-humoured satire. According to some early gossip, his father was 'a merry-cheeked old man', and from him William



inherited a gift for quick repartee, of which his literary work offers abundant example. There are one or two familiar anecdotes illustrating his love of a jovial quip, even a turn for a harmless practical joke. 'Sweet,' 'friendly,' 'gentle,' 'witty,' are the epithets most commonly associated with his name by his personal friends. There survive, too, a few contemporary references to Shakespeare's modes of work. These tell of 'his right happy and copious industry', of the fertility and facility of his pen. Some complain of his failure to correct his manuscripts. He is said never to have erased a line. That statement seems an exaggeration. For the text of his plays indicate that he did not always refuse the labours of revision. But in view of the mere amount of work he completed in some twenty years of his working life, no doubt is permissible of either his fluency or his powers of application. Other evidence proves him to have been an extraordinarily rapid reader, to have absorbed what he read with a magical alertness, to have assimilated books almost as easily as ordinary men inhale air.

Thus the external evidence reveals a genial, business-like man, working rapidly and methodically; a modest man, not overrating his own achievement at his friends' expense; one who outwardly betrayed sympathy with normal middle-class interests or ideals. Robert Browning, among literary men of the Victorian era, was in these regards not unlike Shakespeare. Browning in social intercourse proved, as a consequence, something of a disappointment to ecstatic worshippers.

## II

It is to the internal evidence that I am directing your attention to-night. Let me state my object precisely. I propose to discuss with you—I am afraid somewhat summarily and perfunctorily—what are the reader's substantial chances of discerning in Shakespeare's plays clear, definite, distinct testimony to the manner of man that the dramatist was. I deal to-night with the plays alone, not with the *Sonnets*. I omit the *Sonnets* of malice prepense, and I hope you will agree with me, as I proceed to develop the argument, that that omission is justifiable. Personally, I believe that the luxuriance of Shakespeare's dramatic instinct largely dominated that outburst of lyric melody which gives the *Sonnets* their life. That is my personal view. At the same time, I set in quite different categories the relation in which a poet's personality stands to lyric expression and the relation in which it stands to dramatic expression. No general argument regarding the poet's personality in the plays need therefore be materially affected by a study of the *Sonnets*.

I have been the target of a good many critical arrows in the matter of the *Sonnets*. If I admit, for the sake of a quiet evening, that Shakespeare's *Sonnets* give voice throughout to personal emotion (and to nothing besides), the admission has no immediate pertinence save as tending to create a presumption that there is no self-revelation in the plays. The dominant topic of the *Sonnets*—an absorbing affection for a beautiful youth, an affection altogether transcending friendship—finds no place in the plays. That fact of omission suggests that Shakespeare's personality, if it lie on the surface of the *Sonnets*,



is concealed in the plays. For myself, I believe that dramatic forces are at work in the *Sonnets*, forces which produce the potent illusion of a personal confession, without offering sure evidence that Shakespeare is literally transcribing a personal experience. The poet's irresistible dramatic instinct was quite capable of presenting an affair of his art in a guise which would hardly make it distinguishable from an affair of his heart. But it would take me too far from my immediate purpose to pursue this thorny path.<sup>1</sup>

I confine my present inquiry to the plays alone, and I ask, Does Shakespeare reveal himself to us there? I do not mean as Rousseau reveals himself in his *Confessions*, or as Johnson stands revealed in the pages of Boswell, but, say, as Cicero or Horace, as Burke or Shelley, lift the curtain on dominant predilections and prejudices in published words. Do Shakespeare's plays, like Cicero's or Burke's oratory, declare from time to time his precise likes or dislikes, his definite convictions and prejudices? Do we learn his private opinions on religion, on politics, and the other matters which more or less occupy every thinking man's attention? From 'personality' I here exclude physical characteristics and biographical details. I am not concerned with the everyday virtues and repugnances which most men of repute share alike. My inquiry is directed to distinguishing idiosyncrasies, to individual characteristics, to peculiar experiences of mind or heart.

At a first glance the theme may look simple enough. An author gives in the written page an expression of what is in him. He can have nothing else to give. Consequently all, it may be thought, one who seeks knowledge of an author's particular personality has to do, is to extract it from the verbal receptacle to which he committed it. But this is a superficial aspect of a highly complex question. There is a quibbling conundrum which asks, 'How can a thing be lost, when you know where it is?' and has for answer that the thing is at the bottom of the sea, or in the bottomless crevasse of a mountain. It may or may not be that the question I ask to-night may fairly provoke some such repartee. At any rate the speculation is difficult, and before we part with it, it imposes on us the obligation of glancing at the manner in which poetic genius works, and at the intellectual processes which are more especially involved in the creation of great drama.

<sup>1</sup> This is no place for fuller discussion of the question of the *Sonnets*, in which I fully recognize the potency of the illusion. I should, however, like to add that my difference of view does not lead me to under-estimate the value or interest attaching to what Canon Beeching, Professor Raleigh, and Mr. A. C. Bradley have recently written on the significance of the poems. Perhaps I may mention that some points in the argument which I first advanced in my *Life of Shakespeare* I have since developed in the introduction to the facsimile of the first edition of the *Sonnets*, which the Oxford University Press published in 1905, as well as in an article, entitled 'Ovid and Shakespeare's Sonnets', which I contributed to the centenary number of the *Quarterly Review* in April of the present year. The *Quarterly* article does not touch the main issue of the controversy, but is an endeavour to illustrate a process of Shakespeare's intellectual development, which has, I think, a bearing on the working of his inspiration and on his mode of composition. In this connexion the comment of the poet Keats is worth quoting. Writing on November 22, 1817, to his friend, John Hamilton Reynolds, from Leatherhead, where he was living for the time in studious seclusion, the poet remarks, 'One of the three books I have with me is Shakespeare's Poems; I never found so many beauties in the Sonnets—they seem to be full of fine things said *unintentionally*—in the intensity of working out conceits' (*Letters of John Keats*, ed. H. Buxton Forman, 1895, p. 49).

## III

On the main question, Does Shakespeare reveal a tangible personality in his plays? diametrically opposite answers have been given by eminent critics. The doctors disagree. It may perhaps help us to appreciate the difficulties of the road along which we are travelling, if I report a few of the verdicts which have been already pronounced by judges whose decisions deserve attention. The theory of a personal note in the plays is of recent origin, and I can only quote in its support writers of comparatively youthful standing. I think that the earliest champion of a recognizable personality in Shakespearean drama is Emerson, the American essayist and moralist. These are sentences penned by Emerson near sixty years ago:—

‘Shakespeare is the only biographer of Shakespeare; . . . with Shakespeare for biographer, instead of Aubrey and Rowe, we have really the information which is material. . . . We have his recorded convictions on those questions which knock for answer at every heart. . . . What trait of his private mind has he hidden in his dramas? . . . So far from Shakespeare’s being the least known, he is the one person in all modern history fully known to us.’

Professor Dowden, Dr. George Brandes, and many German writers who are entitled to a respectful hearing, have written much to the same effect. Professor Raleigh has very lately ranged himself at Emerson’s side and has asked, with more than Emerson’s warmth, ‘How dare we complain that Shakespeare has hidden himself from our knowledge (in the plays)?’ Professor Raleigh appears to detect neither ambiguity nor obscurity in Shakespeare’s presentment of his personality in his plays. The impersonal view ‘would (the professor alleges) never be entertained by an artist, and would have had short shrift from any of the company that assembled at the Mermaid Tavern’. At the Mermaid Tavern, you will remember, Shakespeare and the great authors of his age were wont to assemble for convivial recreation. It would be unfair to discredit the Emersonian view because excess of enthusiasm has led a supporter into error. A good cause will not be killed by a bad argument. But Professor Raleigh’s remark, that ‘an artist’ would never entertain anything but the personal theory, places his cause at some disadvantage. For it is ‘artists’ in literature who have asserted most confidently and persistently that Shakespeare was predominantly, supremely impersonal in his capacity of dramatist. Coleridge and Sir Walter Scott are among those who deny by anticipation the Emersonian verdict. Neither can be refused the title of ‘artist’. Of later judges, let me summon Emerson’s friend, Carlyle, who wrote, ‘I will say of Shakespeare’s work generally that we have no full impress of him there.’ To much the same effect spoke Pater, one of the most penetrating of modern critics—‘As happens with every true dramatist, Shakespeare is for the most part hidden behind the persons of his creations.’ Carlyle and Pater’s conclusions are irreconcilable with Emerson’s words: ‘We have his recorded convictions on those questions which knock for answer at every heart. . . . What trait of his private mind has he hidden in his dramas?’ Carlyle and Pater strike the note which, in spite of Professor Raleigh, is, with rare exceptions, habitual among ‘artists’, who have engaged in the discussion.



The most emphatic testimony to the 'impersonality' of Shakespearean drama comes from the most psychological of English poets and a dramatic artist of no mean order, Robert Browning. He bluntly declared that Shakespeare 'ne'er so little' at any point of his work 'left his bosom's gate ajar', and in his elaborate poem called *At the Mermaid*, he suggests prophetically the sort of 'shrift' which Professor Raleigh and his friends would have received at the tavern from the dramatist himself. In this familiar poem Browning presents Shakespeare in the informal and sociable confines of *The Mermaid*, addressing himself confidentially to his literary comrades on the very topic we are discussing to-night. The dramatist, after indulging in the pleasures of the convivial board just so far as to make him bring nothing but 'the truth out', is supposed to describe his creative mode of work as he hands the finished product to the circle of his intimate friends. Shakespeare's words, as Browning imagined them, run thus :—

Here's my work ; does work discover  
 What was rest from work—my life ? . . .  
 Blank of such a record truly  
 Here's the work I hand—this scroll,  
 Yours to take or leave ; as duly  
 Mine remains the unproffered soul . . .

The poet silences Emersonian criticism with the taunting interrogation :

Which of you did I enable  
 Once to slip inside my breast,  
 There to catalogue and label  
 What I like least, what love best ?

Browning warns us that all sorts and conditions of life pass before us in procession in Shakespeare's plays, that Shakespeare's characters disclose to us all the secrets of their mind and heart. But as for the man who creates this mighty expanse of human comedy and human tragedy, he never wears his heart on his sleeve for daws to peck at, his own personality is his own secret, to which his pen is not the key. It is clear if Browning be in the right, Emerson and his followers are in the wrong.

To my thinking, the difficulties, even dangers, in Emerson's view of the omnipresence of Shakespeare's personality in his drama are insuperable. The dramatist's art obviously imposed on him the obligation of investing the great crowd of characters with all manner of emotions and sentiments which of necessity are irreconcilable one with another. His private opinions may be there ; doubtless in a subtle sense they are there. But what is the critical test whereby we can distinguish Shakespeare's private utterances and opinions from the private utterances and opinions of his dramatic creations ? Where is the critical chemistry which will disentangle, precipitate, isolate his personal views and sentiments ?

#### IV

I admit there are a few—a very few—plain and positive references to incidents which must belong to Shakespeare's experience. There is occasional mention in the two parts of *Henry IV*, in *The Taming of the*

*Shrew*, and in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, of places and persons with which only a native of Stratford-on-Avon could have been familiar. There are words and expressions which are peculiar to Warwickshire. There are references to country games and field sports of the graphic energy which testifies to sympathy with outdoor exercise. But I have larger topics in mind at the moment. I am seeking a clue to peculiar, spiritual or intellectual affinities, to individual experiences of emotion or passion.<sup>1</sup>

We shall all allow that Shakespeare's work shows sign of steady progress in art, and was clearly progressive in quality. His hand grew firmer, his thought richer, as his years increased. Throughout, there is steady development of dramatic power and dramatic temper. With his advance in age comes, in comedy and tragedy alike, a larger grasp of life. Humour and passion both grow larger in conception and scope. But this manifest feature of artistic development is not peculiar to Shakespeare; it indicates no definite idiosyncrasy. Such development is part of the universal law of growth. The mind of a man of thirty looks on life more seriously and with greater knowledge than a man of twenty; a man of forty improves in these regards on a man of thirty, and so on. We need not go to Shakespeare's plays to learn facts so generic as that he began life by being a boy, that he then reached adolescence and middle age, or that he exemplified in his work characteristics of various periods of human life. Such generalities do not help us to the knowledge of his peculiar personal views, to a realization of his individual experiences of mind and heart.

Nor are we likely to reach our goal through those philosophic commonplaces which are bountifully scattered over Shakespeare's work. It may be possible to deduce from the plays a broad practical philosophy which is alive with an active moral sense. Shakespeare often tells us in no faltering tones that men ought so to rise as to master their fate; that mercy in rulers is the brightest jewel in their crown; that vice leads ultimately to destruction. Such deliverances amount to little beyond the axiomatic comments of an intelligent spectator on the life outside himself. The case would be very different if we met in Shakespeare's writings with frequent pronouncements on religion, ethics, political economy, and the like, which qualified or questioned accepted beliefs, which had little or no relevance to the dramatic action or context, and which owed no suggestion to the story-books whence Shakespeare immediately derived his plots. If there were many inconsistencies between the character of the persons on whose lips was set a specific moral or political argument, and the argument itself, one could hardly avoid the deduction that there the dramatist spoke in his own person. But the enunciation of distinctive dogma is rare, and there is no unanimity among critics as to passages in the plays which are impertinent to the context. The few moral or ethical disquisitions which seem at a first glance non-dramatic or strike an unaccustomed note frequently owe some suggestion to popular literature of the day. But Shakespeare's dramatic instinct is

<sup>1</sup> For a rather more 'personal' interpretation of Shakespeare's dramatic writings than I see my way to accept, I refer my readers to a lecture of admirable sanity by Mr. A. C. Bradley, which has just been published in his *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, pp. 311 sqq. I do not think on the essential issues the difference between Mr. Bradley and myself is, despite appearances, very great.



commonly so alert as to fuse the speech with the character completely enough to deprive of substance the charge of irrelevant self-revelation. A reiterated sentiment may strike a personal note. But the sentiments which Shakespeare is in the habit of reiterating are not distinctive. They have for the most part a proverbial veracity, and merely attest a healthy-minded sagacity which throws no light on individual personality.<sup>1</sup> There emerge no distinct clues to the idiosyncrasy which sets Shakespeare apart from the general run of humanity.

## V

As soon as we search for the traits peculiar to individual character, for specific opinion on points of great and unending controversy, we are involved in a maze from which there is no sure exit. Let us be adventurous enough to assume that Shakespeare privately believed with Brutus that arbitrary despotic rule imposed on the subject the duty of assassinating the despot. We thereby condemn ourselves to hopeless perplexity as soon as we examine the doctrine of binding respect for authority which Shakespeare makes the bishops expound in his play of *Henry V*. Clearly, our minds will be torn asunder if we arbitrarily seek autobiography in mere dramatic poetry and mere dramatic utterance.

On Emerson's showing we ought to be able to discover from Shakespeare's flood of speech his private opinions on such a far-reaching topic as the nature and conditions of property, a topic closely interwoven with the bases of human happiness. In one place Shakespeare bids wealth or comfort 'expose itself to feel what others feel', and then shake off all superfluities and show heaven's justice by sharing riches with the poor; 'so distribution should undo excess, And each man have enough.' Again, he makes poor people point out that 'what authority surfeits on would relieve us'. 'The meanness that afflicts us is as an inventory to particularize their abundance.' Poverty is due to the superfluity of wealth in high places.

Yet elsewhere we are told no less clearly that the division of society into ranks, with wealth and dignity nicely proportioned to each grade, is the keystone of society: that the current distinctions between high and low, rich and poor, are nature's laws: that the reverence involuntarily shown by the commoner for the peer, by the labourer for his employer, is 'the angel of the world', the salt of civilization. As soon as you reduce mankind to one uniform level of authority or property, you 'make a sop of all this solid globe' and condemn it to chaotic dissolution.

From the first series of quotations the collectivist might be tempted

<sup>1</sup> For example, Shakespeare is fond of ringing the changes, in plays of various dates, on the common proverb 'Self-praise is no recommendation'. Cf. *All's Well*, I. iii. 5-7: 'we make foul the clearness of our deservings, when of ourselves we publish them'; *Troil. and Cress.*, I. iii. 241-2: 'The worthiness of praise distains his worth, If that the praised himself bring the praise forth'; and *Coriolanus*, IV. vii. 51: 'And power, unto itself most commendable, Hath not a tomb so evident as a chair To extol what it hath done.' A more persistent reiteration of a proverbial sentiment is illustrated by the following quotations:—

*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, II. iv. 188: 'one heat another heat expels';

*Romeo and Juliet*, I. ii. 45: 'one fire burns out another's burning';

*Julius Caesar*, III. i. 172: 'As fire drives out fire';

*Coriolanus*, IV. vii. 54: 'one fire drives out one fire.'

to infer that Shakespeare is of his party. If one isolate the second series, the individualists would be equally justified in claiming Shakespeare as one of themselves. I think it safer to conclude that he succeeded here in keeping in his own bosom the secret of his private partisanship.

Wellnigh every social topic is mentioned in his plays, but the oracle is for practical purposes always ambiguous. On that delicate question of the right of women to share the work and privileges which are commonly allotted to men alone, Shakespeare speaks in many voices. Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* dons the barrister's wig and gown, and pleads in court of law with an eloquence and an astuteness which might well be held to prove that women are perfectly able to compete with men in at least one of the masculine professions. Yet Shakespeare elsewhere condemns without qualification women who ape the aspirations of men, and asserts that

A woman mannish grown  
Is not more loathed than an effeminate man.

Who can say whether Shakespeare's heart beat in steadier unison with lawyer Portia than with Desdemona, whose intellectual horizon was limited by wifely duty?

Take a minor matter of social economy about which, on the Emersonian assumption, we ought to be in no doubt as to Shakespeare's personal predilection. Did he approve or disapprove of abstinence from strong drink? A man's attitude to that question is wont to shed light on his mental, moral, and physical constitution. In one place Shakespeare says, 'O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains; that we should with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause transform ourselves into beasts (by drinking wine).' A military officer is credited by the dramatist with the remark: 'I could well wish courtesy would invent some other custom of entertainment.' Shakespeare makes a hale and hearty old man account for his good health thus:—

Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty;  
For in my youth I never did apply  
Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood; . . .  
Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,  
Frosty but kindly.

Elsewhere we find commendation of 'honest water that never left man in the mire'. Well may it be argued that Shakespeare detected small virtue in grape juice or fermented liquors.

But what shall be said of him when we find that almost at the same time as he hymns the praise of 'honest water', he salutes the vine as 'the merry cheerer of the heart'? On sherris sack, a very strong potation, he bestows an unqualified benediction. 'A good sherris sack hath a two-fold operation in it. It ascends me into the brain; dries me there all the foolish and dull and crudy vapours which environ it; makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble fiery and delectable shapes; which, deliver'd o'er to the voice, the tongue, which is the birth, becomes excellent wit. The second property of your excellent sherris is, the warming of the blood; which, before cold and settled, left the liver white and pale, which is the badge of pusillanimity and cowardice: but the sherris warms it and makes it course



from the inwards to the parts extreme: it illumineth the face, which as a beacon gives warning to all the rest of this little kingdom, man, to arm; and then the vital commoners and inland petty spirits muster me all to their captain, the heart, who, great and puffed up with his retinue, doth any deed of courage; and this valour comes of sherris. . . . If I had a thousand sons, the first humane principle I would teach them should be, to forswear thin potations and to addict themselves to sack.' Surely the Emersonian theory puts us here in a new and inextricable dilemma. Very few years separate these self-contradictory utterances on the vice and virtue of drink one from another. There is no ground for arguing that they testify to a change of view, that Shakespeare having first ranged himself with the water-drinkers, subsequently passed to the ranks of the alcoholists, and preached as 'the first humane principle' the duty of deep and strong potations,—or vice versa. Old Adam, Shakespeare's temperance advocate, belongs to the same epoch of Shakespeare's career as Falstaff, his colossal champion of powerful drink. We may form any conjecture that we please as to Shakespeare's personal likes or dislikes here. But it would be a conjecture mainly coloured by our own idiosyncrasy. Are we not once again driven, on the strict evidence of his own words, to the conclusion that whatever Shakespeare's convictions, preferences, or habits in the matter of drink, he did not choose to label and catalogue them consistently in drama?

## VI

Perhaps Emerson might admit that in the matter of these controverted questions of social polity there is need of qualifying the assertion that Shakespeare was his own biographer, his own confessor. In any case speculations about the personal significance of detached passages merely touch the fringe of the Emersonian argument. In a somewhat different plane stands the imposing central feature of Emerson's position from which no retreat is possible without yielding the citadel altogether. The main plank in the Emersonian platform to which Emerson's disciples are deeply committed, may not be the identity between Shakespeare's personal views, and isolated expressions of opinion in the plays on great controversies. From that assumption of identity the personal theory has arbitrarily borrowed much collateral support. But the fundamental basis of the personal theory lies elsewhere. It mainly rests on an alleged correspondence between the dominant mood or tone of a play taken as a whole, and the dominant mood or tone of Shakespeare's private sentiment or experience at the time of writing. Put broadly, we are asked to believe that some great sorrow, some overwhelmingly tragic incident in his own career impelled Shakespeare to tragedy, while joyousness of mind and happy episodes impelled him to comedy and romance. It is common knowledge that Shakespeare, early in the seventeenth century, produced in quick succession that stupendous series of tragedies, which, opening with *Hamlet*, was continued in plays like *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and closed with such impressive embodiments of his genius as *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*. If we examine any recent exposition of the personal theory we learn that this prolonged absorption in tragedy was the outcome of a spiritual calamity, an episode of intensely tragic gloom in the dramatist's private life.

Some critics christen this alleged tragic passage the 'third period' of Shakespeare's working career. Only a crisis of personal tragedy can account, say the theorists, for the abandonment of the rich vein of romantic comedy which distinguishes the work (e.g. *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, and *As You Like It*) immediately preceding the great tragic series. The theorists draw the further inference that the weight of gloom ultimately lifted from Shakespeare's soul. The darkness dissolved. The 'Sturm und Drang' disappeared. The 'third period' ended, and with a serene brow he moved into his 'fourth period', of which the main fruits were the three placid romances *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

It is, I think, generally admitted that there is no external evidence of any tempestuous catastrophes in Shakespeare's private career, which have any kinship, figurative or actual, with the crucial temper of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and the rest. All the external knowledge that we have of this epoch in Shakespeare's biography suggests uninterrupted progress in prosperity, the final farewell to pecuniary difficulties, the final recognition of his eminence by contemporary opinion, the steady growth of reputation, the steady increase of worldly wealth and comfort. But it is circularly argued that these tragedies of crime and grief are there to indicate that, amid all outward signs of material welfare, Shakespeare's spiritual being was a constant prey to tragic torment owing to some unrecorded crisis in his private affairs. Circular arguments never carry us far. The theorists, to prove their point and to convert it into something other than nebulous conjecture, must discover some solid biographic corroboration. Or, at least, by way of alternative, they must look around literary history, and show that every one who has written a series of great tragedies was himself at the time in the grip of calamity, and that every one who penned a romantic comedy was enjoying perfect peace of mind. I believe the theorists will find no more support in literary history than they have hitherto found in Shakespeare's biography. If research in literary history offered them the requisite corroboration, most conceptions of dramatic art would need drastic revision.

## VII

Let us examine the problem free of Emersonian preconceptions. Is there genuine necessity for a recondite, for a personal or a biographical explanation of the fact that Shakespeare at the maturity of his powers devoted his genius for some years almost exclusively to tragedy? I say 'almost exclusively', because in almost every play where the tragic motive predominates there are strokes of comedy, even comic interludes, which seem inconsistent with the notion that Shakespeare in this 'third period' was sunk hopelessly and entirely in the slough of despond. There are bursts of pure humour, of playful merriment in *Hamlet*. There is the Porter in *Macbeth*. The old criticism which would eliminate that broad comedian from Shakespeare's *dramatis personae*, on the ground that the sombre atmosphere of *Macbeth* required more uniform seriousness, is now reckoned obsolete and false. But the personal theorists find it hard to justify the burly humorist's interruption of the tragic crisis, save on some strained argument of sentimentality which urges that discordant laughter will at times, when the heart is breaking, alternate irresponsibly with tears.



A larger consideration, which has to be encountered, seems to weaken irrecoverably the personal theorists' foothold. It can never be forgotten that tragedy is the acme of dramatic art, that every supreme master (save Molière, the exception which proves the rule) has concentrated his mature powers on tragedy. No doubt is permissible that this was the accepted practice of the Elizabethan realm of letters. It was invariably on those who excelled in tragic drama that the greatest reward and the greatest applause were bestowed. Public taste was very different then from what it is now. Public taste then encouraged tragedy in the theatre. Theatrical performances at Elizabeth's and James I's courts reflected literary feeling of the day. They were very frequent, and tragedy was, as a rule, chosen for presentation there on great occasions. How high stood tragedy in the favour of the court, may be judged from such a fact as this, that on Boxing Day (the day after Christmas) 1606, when festivities were furnished on an imposing scale, Shakespeare's company of players was engaged to produce in the royal presence no light comedy or farce, but the most appalling of all tragedies ever penned—Shakespeare's tragedy of *King Lear*. Such a fact graphically illustrates the interval that separates in the field of drama public sentiment of our own time from the public sentiment of Shakespeare's day. Such a fact suggests, too, the direction in which professional considerations were certain to lead an ambitious writer for the Elizabethan stage, as soon as he was fully conscious of his powers.

On this showing, Shakespeare devoted himself to tragedy, because he was a great dramatic artist, who was in close touch and sympathy with contemporary public feeling. It was not as though tragedy were a new venture for Shakespeare when he initiated that great series which ran from *Hamlet* to *Coriolanus* in James I's reign. He had experimented with tragedy from his earliest years. He had proved his tragic genius in *Romeo and Juliet*, in *King John*, in *Richard II*, in *Richard III*. All his history plays, save *Henry V* and *Henry VIII*, are tragedies in a great vein, an intense vein. Master as he was of comedy, he was so ardent in the pursuit of the nobler branch of dramatic art, that into his ripest comedies, such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *Twelfth Night*, he imports a tragic touch, and in his latest so-called romantic comedies, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, the tragic touch often conquers the spirit of comedy. It was in full accord with the artistic development of dramatic genius that tragedy should have claimed his main allegiance for many of his later years, consecutively and almost exclusively. It is difficult for those who have escaped the Emersonian yoke to perceive the need of another explanation of the predominant hold which tragedy exerted on the poet's thought.

## VIII

But let us examine more closely the vitalizing processes of great dramatic art. To define those processes is to my thinking to come into open conflict with the personal theory of Shakespearean tragedy. When one considers the operative methods of great drama, the notion that Shakespeare's mind was absorbed during a long period of his career by an overwhelming personal grief, seems to lead straight to a conclusion which subverts all at which the personal theorists aim.

In other words I would contend that had Shakespeare been in this 'third period' the victim of a private calamity or the prey of searing anxiety, he could never have approached the highest pitch of artistic perfection, and could never have written the work assigned to him. No such unfaltering equilibrium, in treatment of plot and character, as distinguished, for example, *Othello* and *Coriolanus*, would have been within his power, had he sought expression in tragedy for agonies of his own heart, for moral and mental catastrophe within the scope of his own conscience.

In these two plays, at any rate, pursuit of artistic perfection is the manifest aim. Does emotional disturbance in the writer's own mind here cloud at any point his artistic path? That, in brief, is the ultimate question at issue.

In ordinary life, passion—more especially passion of tragic intensity—is never quite articulate. The turbulence of strong emotion invariably dims the intellect. The utterance loses proportion. Tragic art is consequently no outcome of a storm of passion, nor the recollection of a storm of passion, within the tragic poet's personal experience. The creative agent is imagination, the capacity to imagine passion rather than to feel it. In tragic drama the poet relies for his success on the potent pliancy of the imaginative faculty.

Shakespeare lay under no misconception on this cardinal point. He credited imagination with creative omnipotence, with the capacity of summoning out of nothingness all manner of emotion, with the power of inventing all manner of appearances of persons and things. Dramatic conceptions, dramatic passion, are, he implies, the coinage of the dramatist's brain and eye.

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.  
Such tricks hath strong imagination,  
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,  
It comprehends some bringer of that joy.

The tragic poet is in transient sympathy with the passions which he delineates. He is sensitive to emotion. He will assuredly have his own normal burden of human sorrow, his normal experience of passion. But it is not from that source that there comes the power of presenting emotion in terms of art. No triumph in dramatic art is accessible to one who is enslaved by colossal agitation, by overwhelming passion. The power of alert observation of life and literature, the power of analysing with calmness what is seen or read, is the main instrument with which the imaginative faculty does its work in dramatic poetry. When Shakespeare wrote that 'the truest poetry was the most feigning' he had these obvious truths in mind.

Indeed there seems no difference of opinion on these matters among those who are chiefly entitled to speak of them with authority. The great critics of antiquity, Plato and Aristotle, are at one in detecting in poetry imitations or appearances of things or sentiments, imitations or appearances which are quite distinguishable from the things or sentiments themselves. Aristotle's classical distinction between history (that which has been) and poetry (that which has not but might have



been) excludes from the dramatic poet's province the poet's actual experience. Bacon's shrewd intelligence saw no less clearly that fiction is the essence of poetry, and he quoted approvingly an ancient apophthegm which represented poetry to be 'the shadow of a lie'. Lyric poetry seemed to fall outside Bacon's purview of literature. He applied his judgement exclusively to drama and epic, and those branches of the poetic art he defined collectively as 'feigned history'. The use of poetry, as he conceives it, is to give 'some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it'. (*Advancement of Learning*, Bk. II, ed. Kitchin, p. 125.) Normal fact or experience is not, according to Bacon, in the plane of epic or dramatic poetry.

Coleridge made the vital point clear when he invented the word 'aloofness' to express the relations between a poet's, and especially a dramatist's, own feelings in private life, and those of which he is the painter or analyst. The dramatic poet is a spectator of the passionate tumult, and not an actor in it. He is a student of emotion. He tempers his presentation of tragic passion with rhythm and measure. His art sternly limits the active range of passion; its wildness or violence is curbed by figures of speech. He reproduces tragic passion not as it is, but so as to create an illusion of truth. Flashes of imaginative realism illumine his pen, and seem to give the words the vivid vigour of Nature. But these intuitions owe their effect to something which lies wholly apart from the poet's conscious external experience; they bear witness to the master's power of modulating language and of fitting it to thought. Artistic intellect or genius is never in great drama at the mercy of the emotional excitement in the artist's immediate environment. His triumphs are produced by a supreme command of his art. 'L'artiste,' wrote a few weeks ago M. René Doumic, the distinguished French critic who is the latest recruit of the French Academy, 'l'artiste n'est pas celui qui a ressenti davantage, mais celui qui est le mieux doué, pour imaginer des états de sensibilité et pour en réaliser l'expression.' ('The artist is not the man who has felt the most, but he who is the best endowed to imagine states of feeling, and to give reality to the expression of them.') That seems to me to sum up fairly the whole situation.

Tragic intensity reaches the highest dramatic pitch in Shakespeare's work in the scene in *Macbeth* which deals with the murder of Duncan, and in the scene in *Othello* which portrays the death of Desdemona. The sentiments of the murderers in both plays are depicted with surest and firmest pencil and betray the loftiest inspiration of dramatic genius. Yet who would venture to suggest for one moment that Shakespeare knew and learned from private experience of murder, or from any personal murderous propensity, the smallest hint for his intimate portrayal of the sentiment governing men or women in the actual perpetration of a murderous crime. His power of vitalizing murderous moods might well throw light on his treatment of other episodes of tragedy, might well suggest that the tragic sentiment lay outside the scope of his personal activities or experiences.

There is in the realm of dramatic art something of the well-known paradox of acting. Artistic expression is not possible in an actor whose intellectual equilibrium is suffering continual disturbance from the vehemence of his own feelings or from his recollections of violent passion.

The French have produced the greatest actors in the world—and the greatest of all French actors, Talma, has explained in detail how an actor who allows his personal feeling or emotion to sway his utterance on the stage loses all power of modulating his voice, loses his memory, strains his gestures, and destroys the effect of great acting. Shakespeare himself acknowledged this paradox of acting when he wrote his warning to actors: 'In the very tempest and, as I might say, whirlwind of passion you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness.' 'Temperance' and 'smoothness' are the fundamental conditions of art. The supremely efficient dramatist is no more exempt from them than the supremely efficient actor, and no dramatist who wrote under the conscious impulse of private sensations of passion past or present is capable of due respect to these primary principles.

Another great French actor explained a temporary failure on the stage by remarking that he 'lived for an unlucky moment in the situation which the dramatist had created. I became the personage himself. I ceased to be the actor of him. I behaved as I should in my own room. Loyalty to the conditions of the theatre means that one is different there from what one is at home.' Such reflections are, in a sense, true of the dramatic artist in the act of writing. He is not as he is in everyday life. Consequently he gives us in his dramatic work sparse or no clues to his personality.

Sir Walter Scott was once asked how he managed to present in his novels all manner of emotions and actions and scenes which were as remote as they well could be from his current experience. He was asked how, amid the preoccupations of his business and his profession, amid all his private anxieties and professional and financial cares, he could write *Waverley* and *Guy Mannering*. He replied that his 'fancy', by which he meant his imaginative faculty, did not concern itself with his private or personal affairs, but 'ran its ain rigs in some other world'. 'As soon as I get the paper before me,' he went on, 'it commonly runs off pretty easily.' I suspect if Shakespeare had been asked the same question about his tragedies as Sir Walter Scott was asked about his novels, he would have answered in much the same terms. Very recently a novelist of eminence, whose power to portray the tragic and pathetic intensities of life is everywhere acknowledged, mentioned to me a tragic episode in one of his books—a moving description of the despair of a wronged wife. That sentiment (he assured me—making due allowance for difference of sex) he had never experienced. He had not met the situation or sentiment in any shape in his intimate experience, yet his portrayal of it gave his readers so perfect an illusion of the truth that some correspondents who had endured the misfortunes of my friend's imaginary heroine greeted him as a fellow-sufferer, and invited more of his consoling confidence. The novelist told me that the passage, which had moved his readers thus, was penned almost unconsciously. When he went to his desk after breakfast to do his ordinary morning's work and wrote these words which were hailed as genuine sensation, he was at first quite uncertain how to continue the tale. As he put pen to paper the development came involuntarily. What my friend modestly called 'his professional faculty' was at work. He meant by 'professional faculty' what critics call the imaginative faculty. His powers of inspiration were active, and all the rest followed.



## IX

Of course, the intensity of Shakespeare's dramatic presentments of life transcends those of my friend. But Shakespeare enjoyed, in a certain direction, an advantage which is denied the modern novelist, an advantage which rendered the dramatist even less dependent than my friend, or less apt than he to rely, on private experience. My friend's relatively smaller imaginative faculty enabled him to dispense with any suggestion of episode which his own affairs offered, although he lay under the obligation of improvising his fable and was bound by literary law to evolve all his plot out of his own ingenuity and intuition. Shakespeare was absolved from such necessity. He did not, like the modern novelist, invent the plots of his tragedies. He worked over old stories. He modified them, and frequently altered the final issue. He omitted some of the old characters and introduced some new ones. But the main theme—jealousy, ingratitude, ambition, sexual infatuation—was there ready to his hand, and its process of evolution was already on record. Had it lain within the conditions of his art when he was delineating one or other of these great passions, for him to draw either suggestion or illustration from his private experience, the call must have lost its energy when history or legend or pre-existing fiction dictated the choice and development of topic. It was not as if Shakespeare went to Holinshed, or to Plutarch or to the Italian novelists, merely for the bare outline of the plot which he filled out with wholly original incident and emotion. He borrowed almost all the incident and followed many an emotional cue. Nay more, at times, as in the case of *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, when he depended on so excellent a piece of literature as North's translation of Plutarch, he took whole speeches from his authority, merely converting with wonderful ingenuity the prose into blank verse. When Volumnia, Coriolanus's mother, pleads with her son in accents of most moving pathos to take pity on his family and fellow-countrymen and to leave the Volscian camp, both sentiment and language are Plutarch's, with the smallest possible change. The indebtedness casts no reflection on Shakespeare. It merely proves that artistic purpose dominated his work in tragedy to the exclusion of any predisposition to autobiographic confession or revelation. Wherever his critical sense taught him that Plutarch's sentiment and language satisfied his artistic need, he wisely adopted them as his own. He knew the meaning and significance of artistic restraint, the folly of painting the lily or gilding refined gold. For the most part the treatment of the tragic theme by the writers who supplied him with his plots fell below the requirements of great tragedy. He allowed his imaginative faculty to range over the details freely, and thereby transmuted rough ore into pure gold, or something more precious than gold. But in the process small room was left, small inducement was present, for expositions of his personal experiences.

Little attention has been paid to a peculiarity which colours Shakespeare's employment of his authorities in the great series of his tragedies, and still further reduces the probability of an alleged correspondence between these masterpieces and the emotion of his contemporary private life. *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*, main links in

this great tragic chain, came rapidly from his pen one after the other. Each pair is based on one and the same authority. The stories of *Othello* and *Measure for Measure* were both derived from a comparatively recent collection of Italian novels by one Cinthio, a disciple of Boccaccio and Bandello. The stories of *Lear* and *Macbeth* both come from Holinshed's *Chronicles*. The stories of *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* both come from North's translation of Plutarch. This constant duality of origin suggests the clearest of all refutations of the personal theory.

It is hardly possible to mistake the manner of Shakespeare's preparation for each pair of these six tragic labours. He found in Cinthio's recent collection of Italian novels a story of jealousy (*Othello*), which appeared to him to lend itself to dramatic treatment. He turned the page and discovered a story revolving about the virtue of chastity and the vice of incontinence (*Measure for Measure*), which impressed him with presenting similar pertinence to his dramatic purpose. It was the sequence in Cinthio which accounted for the order in which the dramatist dealt with the great topics of *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*. There was nothing else in Cinthio which equally deserved a dramatic artist's attention. Consequently Shakespeare looked elsewhere for the suggestion of his next tragedy. He turned to that encyclopædic history by Holinshed, on which he had mainly relied in earlier days for his plays on English history. In a section preceding any that he had before consulted, he detected the narratives of *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, which invited him to the tragic themes of selfish ambition and filial ingratitude. An inferior dramatic hand had already dealt with Holinshed's legend of Lear. But there is no ground for doubting that *King Lear* and *Macbeth* marched together in the procession of Shakespeare's plays, because they both were already linked together in Holinshed's ample volume. So, too, of *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, which were both tragedies from Plutarch's treasury, the one treating of pride of caste, the other of illicit love in high place. Shakespeare's systematic dependence on his reading (and not on his personal circumstance) for his choice of tragic topic is nowhere so plainly indicated as by the evidence that the six masterpieces, which were produced at the zenith of his dramatic power, were, in point of origin, yoked together in pairs.

It is very tempting, though I fear most misleading, to regard this master of imagination as being specifically controlled step by step, in his dramatic career, by variations and alternations of private sensation and personal experience. The theory is not only in conflict with the fact of his reliance on plots which came accidentally under his notice in the course of his reading. It ignores his well ascertained disposition to reconcile his dramatic work with the accidental calls of public taste, and with the requirements of the theatrical managers. His practical life shows that he never deliberately disregarded the bidding of his professional chiefs. The seductive theory that he selected his themes, not for their artistic capability or for their adaptability to popular taste or feeling, but for their correspondence with his transient mood, breaks down under every test.

One personal theorist has it that Shakespeare created Miranda in *The Tempest*, because he was watching with parental affection at home at Stratford the blossoming girlhood and womanhood of his



younger daughter Judith. It is hopeless to take seriously such alleged correlation of cause and effect. It defies chronology. *The Tempest* cannot have been written before 1610, when Miranda was portrayed as an ingenuous maiden of fifteen. Judith Shakespeare was baptized at Stratford-on-Avon on February 2, 1585, and when Shakespeare brought Miranda to birth she was a buxom woman of at least five-and-twenty. Records of her life negative, too, all suggestion of girlish innocence at that period of her career. The personal theory not only rests here on error in point of fact, but is supererogatory. The conception of Miranda was suggested by no episode in Shakespeare's private experience, but by popular romantic stories, for the time in great vogue, of girl princesses torn in infancy from home and civilized society and flung desolate by misfortune on the mercies of nature. Within a short period of the composition of *The Tempest* Shakespeare had experimented with this maiden type in two plays, first in the person of Marina in *Pericles*, and then in the person of Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*. In both those pieces he loyally followed the lead of old romances, and though we cannot point with equal assurance to the source of the plot of *The Tempest*, we need have no compunction in declaring Miranda to be the final and the ripened fruit of the dramatist's imaginative study of unsophisticated girlhood which he had found lightly sketched in fiction by feebler pens.

Again, it is suggested that only a mood of misanthropy in the author could explain such an intense portrait of the misanthropic temperament as is presented in *Timon of Athens*. The tragedy of *Timon of Athens* is not wholly of Shakespeare's authorship. The greater part is from the pedestrian pen of a play-writing hack coadjutor. The character of Timon and the scenes which he dominates are assuredly, however, from Shakespeare's pen. Timon is a tragic conception cast in the mould of Lear. It is an imaginative presentment of misanthropy in most lurid colours. But there is no justification for seeking its genesis in a phase of Shakespeare's personal temperament. Timon Misanthropos the Athenian, whom Plutarch's pen had graphically limned in his *Life of Mark Antony*, was already recognized in the literature of all Northern Europe to be the ultimate embodiment of the misanthropic tendency. Timon's history had already formed the plot of an Elizabethan play, and was acclaimed a fit topic for ambitious tragedy throughout the civilized world. His characteristic sentiment had been vividly described of old, not only by Plutarch but by Lucian, the Greek satirist, whose disposition was the reverse of sour. Shakespeare's Timon came into the day's work, and the tragic intensity of the portrait bears new witness to the omnipotence of his imaginative faculty. We should remember, too, that at the same time as the dramatist was painting the misanthropic Timon he was sketching, in *Pericles*, the charm and innocence of the girl Marina. That fact summarily confutes the fancy that Timon's cynical hatred of mankind had entered even temporarily the dramatist's own soul.

## X

Thus I reach the conclusion that Browning's conception of Shakespeare is juster than Emerson's. In his work it is vain to look for his biography, for his specific personal sensation. His work did not 'discover what was rest from work—his life'. His work discovered

the omnipotence of his imaginative faculty, his all-absorbing devotion to art. In his work he did not air his own woes. If he suffered from 'Weltschmerz' or 'world-smart', he made no precise or quite recognizable report of his sensation in the printed page. Like Sir Walter Scott, as soon as he took pen in hand, his 'fancy ran its ain rigs in some other world'. Like the great French actor, he was in his study a different being from the theatrical shareholder in London, or from the owner of house property at Stratford-on-Avon, or from the father of a family. Imaginative genius enables its possessor to live in fancy more lives than one. The number of Shakespeare's lives was greater than that of any other human being because of the supreme pliancy of his imaginative genius. To seek in his mighty drama close-fitting links with the life which he led by his own hearthstone, is in my view to misapprehend the most distinctive note of his miraculous gift of genius.







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